





## God's Most Successful Setback

Christmas marked the beginning of God's most successful setback. He has always delighted to show his power through apparent defeat. He makes tactical retreats in order to win strategic victories.

In the Old Testament, Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, was promised glory and power in his dream (Genesis 37:5–11). But to achieve that victory he had to become a slave in Egypt. And as if that were not enough, when his conditions improved because of his integrity, he was made worse than a slave: a prisoner.

But it was all planned—planned by God for his good and the good of his family, and eventually for the good of the whole world! For there in prison he met Pharaoh's butler, who eventually brought him to Pharaoh, who put him over Egypt. And finally his dream came true. His brothers bowed before him, and he saved them from starvation. What an unlikely route to glory!

But that is God's way—even for his Son. He emptied himself and took the form of a slave. Worse than a slave—a prisoner—and was executed. But like Joseph, he kept his integrity. “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Philippians 2:9–10).

And this is God's way for us too. We are promised glory—*if* we will suffer with him as it says in Romans 8:17. The way up is down. The way forward is backward. The way to success is through divinely appointed setbacks. They will always look and feel like failure.

But if Joseph and Jesus teach us anything this Christmas, it is this: What Satan and sinful men meant for evil, “God meant for good . . .” (Genesis 50:20).

You fearful saints fresh courage take  
 The clouds you so much dread  
 Are big with mercy and will break  
 In blessings on your head.<sup>4</sup>

4 William Cowper, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way,” 1773.